

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Ezra: Encouraging God's People Unto Spiritual Renewal

IX. Responding Constructively To Oppressive Marxists In Influential Roles (Ezra 10:1-17)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

A lot of oppressive Marxists are in influential roles today, so we need to know how to respond constructively:

(1) Oppressive Marxists abound in the government bureaucracy: "Philip K. Howard" in the "Yale Law Journal" wrote, "Modern government 'is structured to pre-empt the active intelligence of people on the ground . . . a deliberate precept of its operating philosophy. Law will not only set goals and governing principles, but . . . dictate exactly how to implement those goals . . .'" (George Will, "Progressivism begets nightmare," Republican-American, January 28, 2021, p. 8A) Thus, "(c)onstructing the Empire State Building took 410 days in the Great Depression" while "(i)n this century . . . nine years were consumed just with permitting for a San Diego desalination plant," Ibid.

(2) Oppressive Marxists abound in the mainstream media: Rich Lowry ("Media vs. First Amendment," Ibid., January 27, 2021, p. 8A) noted, "Long a stalwart defender of the First Amendment, the American news media are having second thoughts . . . now, journalists have lurched from finding a threat to freedom of the press in every criticism of reporters and news outlets by former President Donald Trump, to . . . calling for unwelcome media organizations to be shut down. They've become the thing they profess to hate -- close-minded censors . . ."

(3) Oppressive Marxists impact the new administration: the January 30, 2021 lead editorial, "Too much, too fast" in the Republican-American, p. 8A, claimed, "The flurry of executive orders [President Biden] has issued . . . will turn the United States into multiple radical directions. The worst of them are the assorted job-killers disguised as climate-change measures . . . Close behind are the social engineering schemes" that reflect Marxist ideology.

(4) Oppressive Marxists affect us locally: a Church member called me last Sunday about a believer, a public school teacher who has been directed by her administrator(s) to teach the Marxist ideology of Black Lives Matter in the classroom. Predictably, some parents have complained that the school is pushing an unwanted ideology on their children, and the teacher is distressed at having to teach material she believes is sinful though she fears she will lose her job with its much-needed income for her family were she to refuse to finish teaching the course!

Need: *So, we ask, "How can we respond constructively to oppressive Marxists in influential roles?!"*

- I. Ezra faced a crisis where he could have acted as an oppressive governor over his people, Ezra 10:1-11:**
- A. When he learned about Israel's mixed marriages, Ezra was shocked, in need of responding effectively as Israel's governor with authority to punish the people severely, Ezra 10:1 with Ezra 7:25-26:
 - 1. Persia's king had sent Ezra to teach his fellow Hebrews Scripture, giving him authority to administer even capital punishment if necessary to cause his countrymen to obey Scripture and Persia's king, Ezra 7:25-26.
 - 2. Thus, when Ezra learned that many Hebrews had violated God's Deuteronomy 7:3-4 prohibition not to marry pagan wives because it would lead to idolatry, the gravity of this sin and its impending divine judgment troubled Ezra, and he as governor could have reacted by severely oppressing Israel, Ezra 10:1.
 - B. Speaking on behalf of the people, the man Shechaniah addressed Ezra to acknowledge the nation's grave sin, but suggesting that there was hope of God's forgiveness if they put away their pagan wives and children born by them. Shechaniah also encouraged Ezra to take the lead as governor in administering this matter, affirming that the people of Israel would follow his lead in addressing the problem, Ezra 10:2-4.
 - C. Ezra heeded Shechaniah's advice, and sought to lead Israel from sin unto holiness, Ezra 10:5-11:
 - 1. As governor, Ezra made the chief priests, the Levites and all the people swear unto the Lord that they would put away their pagan wives and the children born by them as Shechaniah had suggested, Ezra 10:5.
 - 2. He also proclaimed throughout Judah and Jerusalem that all the Hebrews should gather at the temple in three days for this plan to be administered or lose their property and part in the nation, Ezra 10:7-8 ESV.
 - 3. When the people gathered in obedience to Ezra's summons, he confronted them about their sin and called them to separate themselves from the pagans of the area from their pagan wives, Ezra 10:9-11.
- II. The people admitted that they had sinned greatly, but added that care needed to be taken in applying Ezra's call that they not be greatly oppressed, so they urged Ezra to take those steps, Ezra 10:12-14:**
- A. On the one hand, all the people admitted that they had sinned, that they must do as Ezra had said, Ezra 10:12.
 - B. However, they explained to Ezra that he needed to take care how he applied his directive in order to avoid oppressing them as their governor, Ezra 10:13-14:

1. The Hebrew adverb '*abal*' introduces Ezra 10:13, what in Ezra's day had become a "decided adversative" that meant, "but." (Kittel, *Biblia Hebraica*, p. 1299; B. D. B., *A Heb. and Eng. Lex. of the O. T.*, p. 6)
2. Thus, by use of '*abal*', the people agreed that Ezra needed to act, "but" that he do so with care (as follows):
 - a. First, the people explained that many of them had sinned in the matter of mixed marriages, what would require time to address properly with all the complications that affected the many cases, Ezra 10:13a, c.
 - b. Second, the time of year was November-December (Ezra 10:9; *Bible Know. Com., O. T.*, p. 671) when it was not only cold, but pouring rain on the men along with their wives and little children, what created a physical crisis for the people that needed to be addressed immediately, Ezra 10:13a, 9b.
3. Accordingly, the people suggested that Ezra delegate to local town officials the task of judging the marital cases by appointment, for local officials would know all about all the marriages in their towns, Ezra 10:14. In some cases, there may have been pagan wives who had since come to worship God as qualified wives of their Hebrew husbands (*Ibid.*), and local officials who knew these women would be good judges of such cases where Ezra who was ignorant of individual cases would not be able to make adequate judgments.

III. Ezra chose not to act as an oppressive governor, but considerately to heed the peoples' suggestions, and the sin in the nation was handled in an edifying manner in three months, Ezra 10:16-17 with Ezra 10:9.

Lesson: *Confronted with a serious sin in Israel, Ezra chose not to act like an oppressive governor, but he heeded the practical suggestions of his subordinates in how to address the sin, producing an edifying result.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) If we are in a position of influence and we face a difficulty with subordinates, may we like Ezra not compromise our stands, but consider suggestions subordinates offer as they may provide invaluable insight from their viewpoint that equips us to avoid being needlessly oppressive. (2) If we are subordinates, (a) may we offer suggestions to overseers to alleviate oppression. (b) If the overseer does not respond well, may we remove ourselves from being exposed to his oppressive actions. (2 Timothy 3:1-5)*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We apply this sermon to the issues mentioned in our introduction and to our application above (as follows):

(1) On responding to oppressive, unheeding Marxists in the government bureaucracy, 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 with 2 Thessalonians 3:10 call us to work for our livelihoods as independently as possible from such oppressive bureaucrats in order to preserve our good testimony and avoid being in any material need.

(2) On the censorship efforts by oppressive, unheeding Marxists in the mainstream media, John 16:13 claims the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth, and John 17:17 with 2 Timothy 3:16-17 assert that Scripture provides the truth we need to do every good work. We should thus heed God's edifying Scriptures and not the mainstream media!

(3) On the executive orders produced by oppressive, unheeding Marxists who impact the new administration, 1 John 5:19 with Matthew 4:8-9 reveals that the entire world, including secular governments and their officials, are under Satan's control, and 1 John 2:15-17 calls us not to love the world and its lusts, but to do the will of God for an eternal reward. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 also directs us to withdraw from abusive parties for our own welfare. We should thus try to position ourselves to be as unaffected as possible to any harmful executive order and focus on doing God's will. For example, since the president's executive order to stop work on the Keystone XL pipeline will likely cause fuel prices to rise, we can consider now how to lessen our use of fuel, think about using other fuels for heating, etc.

(4) On a believer's being told by an unheeding, oppressive overseer to sin to keep his job, 1 Corinthians 7:23 ESV calls us believers not to "become" (*ginesthe*, *U. B. S. Grk. N. T.*, 1966, p. 593) the slaves of men. We must thus follow God's lead in selecting a realm of employment that liberates us from being bound by men to sin, aiming to be as independent as possible from the control of worldly parties in earning a livelihood, 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12.

(5) On functioning as a non-oppressive overseer if we are put into a position of oversight, may we like Ezra (a) allow for a sensible amount of time to address problems (Ezra 10:9, 17), (b) seek to use local leadership to address problems (Ezra 10:14; cf. Genesis 41:48 where Joseph stored the excess grain beside the fields where it was grown for greater management in its later distribution), (c) seek to lessen hardships for subordinates in addressing problems (Ezra 10:9c, 13b) and (d) carefully weigh suggestions we receive from subordinates in order to discern if we as overseers may have overlooked important items that we need to address (Ezra 10:2-5, 13).

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. To handle oppressive Marxist leaders constructively, may we try to offer helpful suggestions, but if we are not heeded, may we avoid exposing ourselves to their oppression. May we overseers not oppress others.